

THE TEN-SQUARE: A TRIBUTE

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It's known that for one hundred years
Puzzlists strove for what appears
Could not be done within the span
The Good Lord had allotted man.

It may seem odd (to some, absurd)
To see them searching for a word
Which, placed within a grid's top row,
Allowed the other rows below

To take those words which would be valid
And read across and down, and tallied
Rows with columns, top to toe,
And left to right in order, so

The top row's word would also read
Down column one; then they'd proceed
To row and column X the same
Till they had finished with this game.

The final X, in this game's case,
Has really put them in their place.
So far, they've managed really fine
With grid squares not exceeding nine,

But grid squares of the order ten
Have made the formists think again.
They may, in fact, have to admit
They've not much chance of making it.

The ten-square seems so convolute,
With certain facts not in dispute,
The best computers of the world,
At this problem bravely hurled,

May need a full quadrillion years
To run through all successive tiers
Of permutations from the list
Of valid words which now exist.

The fifty thousand words or more
Within a valid word-list's store
Do not appear to be enough
To satisfy the ten-square buff.

Some are straining eyes and wrists
In typing words to swell their lists,

But ever-longer lists might lead
To ever-greater time to read.

Such Sisyphean effort goes
To swell esteem for all of those
Who've almost formed a perfect square
And yet had no computer there.

The late Dmitri Borgmann's name
Already's in the Hall of Fame;
Although he only managed seven,
He earned his place in wordplay's Heaven.

LOST WORDS OF LOVE

In Poplollies and Bellibones and Tenderfeet and Ladyfingers, Susan Kelz Sperling established herself as the champion of the obsolete word, resurrecting many from the dusty archives of the OED and placing them in contemporary settings. In Lost Words of Love (Clarkson Potter, 1993; \$14) she charmingly focuses on love and marriage. Here one can learn what advice Millicent Aimcrier, the Ann Landers of yesteryear, gives to the lovelorn; one can eavesdrop on love letters between Romeo and Juliet, or Odysseus and Penelope; or one can tune in a TV interview a la Johnny Carson or Jay Leno. Sperling is especially clever at parodying Ecclesiastes:

*A time to TIDDER, and a time to WROX,
A time to NURRY, and a time to RAFF VIRGIDITY...*

and Elizabeth Barrett Browning:

*How do I love thee? Let me count thy FEAKS;
I love thee to the FOUNCE and breadth and height
My soul can GREEP...*

Her poetry rivals that of Willard Espy, who, in an earlier preface in one of her books, lamented that "words obsolete are mighty hard to rhyme". Not necessarily so!

*At DEAD-LIFT and POTVALIANT, still I SNIRP;
Shall I COURT HOLY WATER? Chance a WURP?*